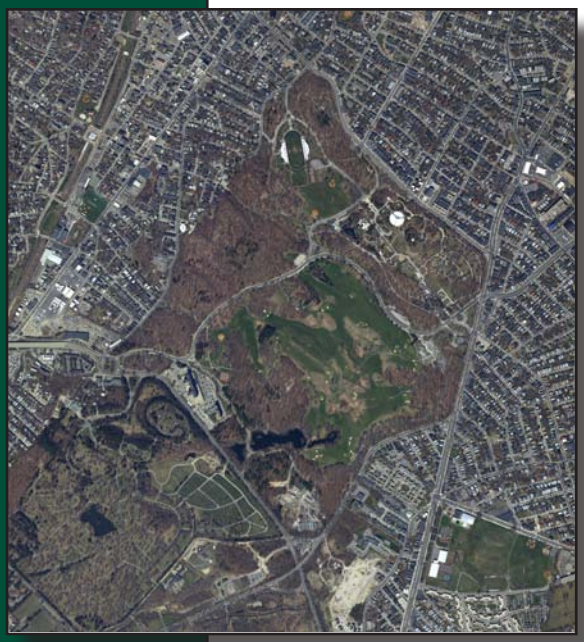

Franklin Park Transportation and Access Study

DRAFT REPORT

Prepared for

Boston Parks and Recreation

Prepared by

Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates, Inc.

in association with

Pressley Associates, Inc.

October 2008

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Note: Each Focus Area outlines the historic design intent, character, or integrity of each location; the issues and perceptions identified through the stakeholder outreach process and previous studies; the findings from the study team; and specific objectives and recommendations for short- and long-term improvements.

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1.0 Executive Summary

This Transportation Study for Franklin Park is intended to provide an evaluation of short and long-term recommendations for pedestrian and vehicular circulation within the City of Boston's largest park and to identify opportunities to make the park more accessible and inviting to visitors. The study builds on information from data collection, a number of previous planning reports, implemented improvements, and community meetings to address the park's infrastructure, the cumulative effect of successive changes both within and around the park's boundary, and current and future trends in recreation use. Furthermore, by looking holistically at pedestrian and vehicular circulation within the park, the study considers ways to improve safety and clarify way-finding so that the recreational experience is enhanced for all.

The significance of Franklin Park is multi-faceted. Not only is it the largest park in the City of Boston and an important neighborhood and regional recreation destination, it is also a premier historic landscape designed by Frederick Law Olmsted as part Boston's Emerald Necklace Park System.

TO BE COMPLETED FOR FINAL DRAFT.

2.0 Introduction

Franklin Park is the largest park in the City of Boston, designed 1881–95 by Frederick Law Olmsted as part of the Emerald Necklace Park System. Today, Franklin Park is important for its many roles – as a nationally significant Olmsted landscape, as the jewel in the historic Emerald Necklace, as a peaceful natural oasis in the city and for its function both as a regional recreational destination and a vital neighborhood park. This multifaceted appeal infuses the park with vitality, history, and contemporary relevance, but at the same time creates challenges for shared use and management.

Circa 1910 hand-colored postcard view of Schoolmasters' Hill from the Circuit Drive (Courtesy City of Boston Parks and Recreation Department).

Over the past century, the park has undergone a number of dramatic changes, including but not limited to the introduction of the automobile, development and redevelopment along the periphery of the park closure of Glen Road the park's original through road as well as many of the internal carriageways/roads to general traffic and the addition of the Golf Course, Shattuck Hospital and the Zoo. The original design for Franklin Park called for active recreational uses in the northern third of the park and passive recreational uses in the southern two-thirds, with the two areas separated by Glen Lane. However, since its earliest days, Franklin Park has seen active recreation throughout the park. Tennis was played in the Ellicottdale section of the park as early as 1895, a small stone cottage nearby designed by John C. Olmsted provided facilities for players.[1] Golf was first "experimentally" introduced to the Country Meadow in 1902, and a toboggan slide was constructed on Schoolmaster Hill in 1902 (see image). The first baseball diamond was added to Ellicottdale in 1945, and White Stadium was constructed on the Playstead in 1949.

Changing public expectations for public parks over the last century have resulted in the need to accommodate new uses and facilities, and alterations of the historic design of Franklin Park. The cumulative effect of successive changes such as the addition of the Zoo, White Stadium, and Shattuck Hospital and the removal of historic roads and paths, combined with the aging infrastructure within and around the park, has also impacted how users access the park and circulate once inside. Activity within the park is ongoing throughout the day, seven days a week, and ranges from very large events with tens of thousands attendees to small groups of residents from adjacent neighborhoods. Providing safe access and accommodations for all modes is critical —on a daily basis as well as peak demand periods.

To address these issues, Howard/Stein-Hudson Associates and Pressley Associates (the study team) prepared this Transportation and Access Study for the Boston Parks and Recreation Department in cooperation with the Boston Transportation Department, Franklin Park Coalition, Zoo New England, and the Lemuel Shattuck Hospital.

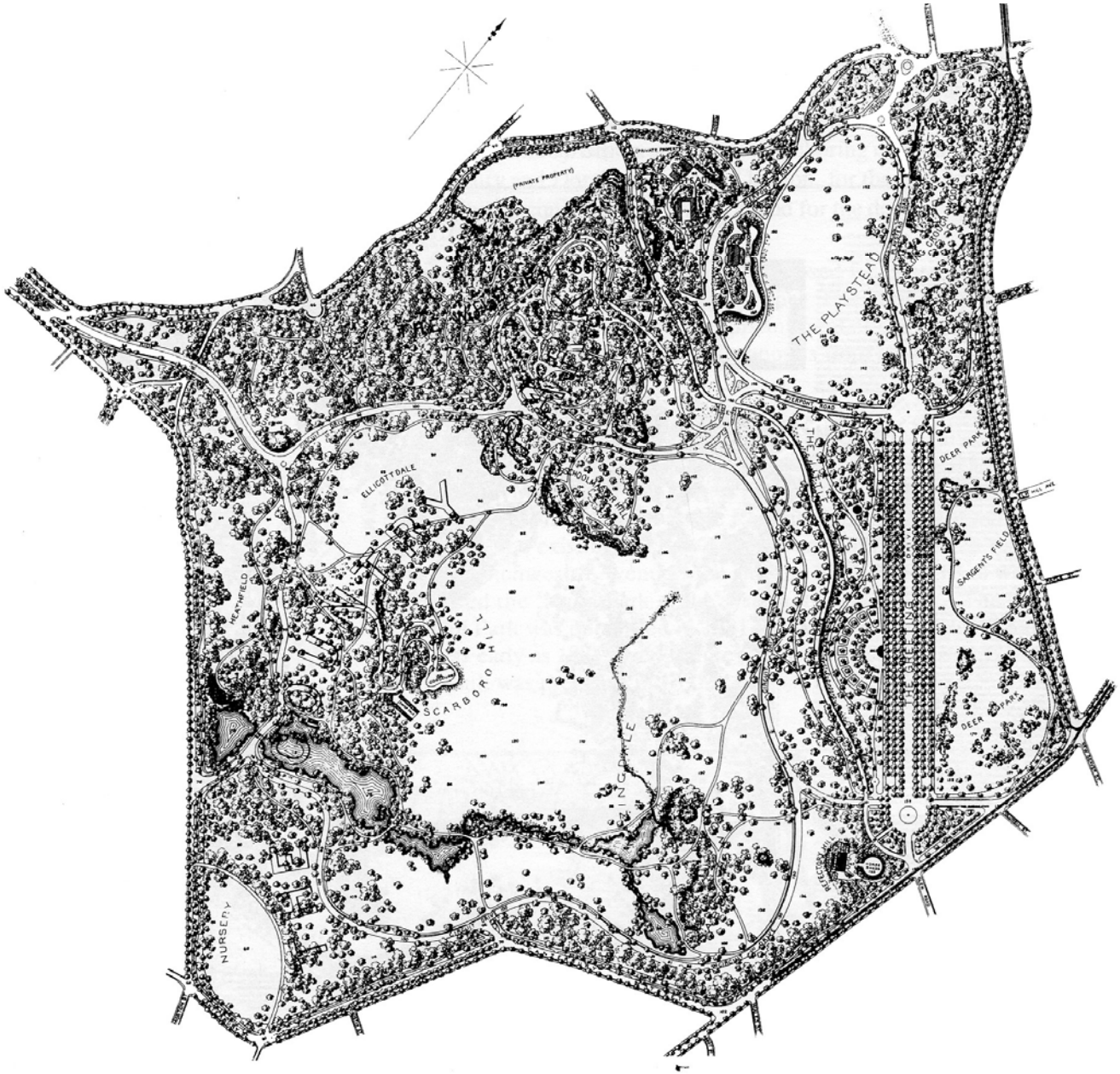
Key objectives of the study are to:

- Improve safety and accessibility to the park;
- Improve circulation within the park;
- Improve how park access and circulation functions as a whole;
- Enhance the function of the park as a recreational destination that is friendly for all users;
- Preserve and/or rehabilitate the historic landscape, particularly with respect to entrances and historic circulation features;
- Develop short-term recommendations for transportation, circulation and access that can easily be implemented and which are sustainable; and
- Develop long-term recommendations and guidelines for transportation, circulation and access that inform or lead to future planning efforts.

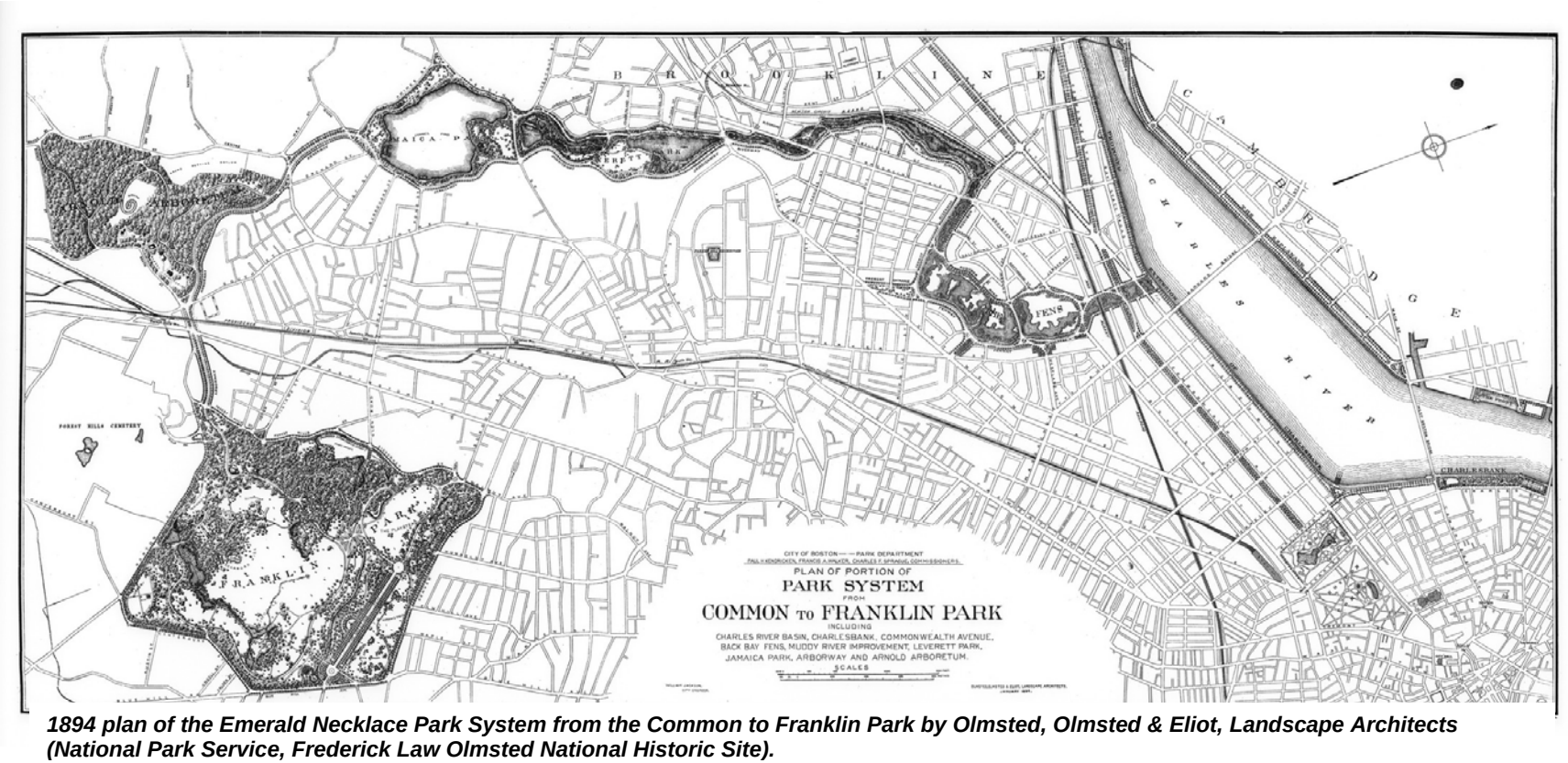
3.0 History

Franklin Park is an historic rural landscape park located in the geographic center of Boston. The land for the park was purchased in 1881 with funds appropriated by the City of Boston, and the park opened to the public, un-landscaped, in 1883. Frederick Law Olmsted began preliminary studies of the park design in 1881 and continued until he retired in 1895. Olmsted's General Plan for the park, completed in 1885, included a summarized version of his 115-page report titled "Notes on the Plan of Franklin Park" (1885) on the left side of the plan. The plan was revised following a citizen petition to include a water feature in Franklin Park, Scarboro Pond, and completed in 1891 (see plan on following page). In accordance with his belief in the restorative value of natural scenery, Olmsted intended for Franklin Park to provide city dwellers a rural place of respite for the contemplation of nature. In 1850, Olmsted visited the work of Joseph Paxton at Birkenhead Park in England (1847), commonly referenced as the first civic park in Britain and often cited as a precedent for the design of Franklin Park, which served as a rural retreat for all residents of Boston.

1891 Revised General Plan of Franklin Park by F.L. Olmsted, showing Scarboro Pond (National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site).



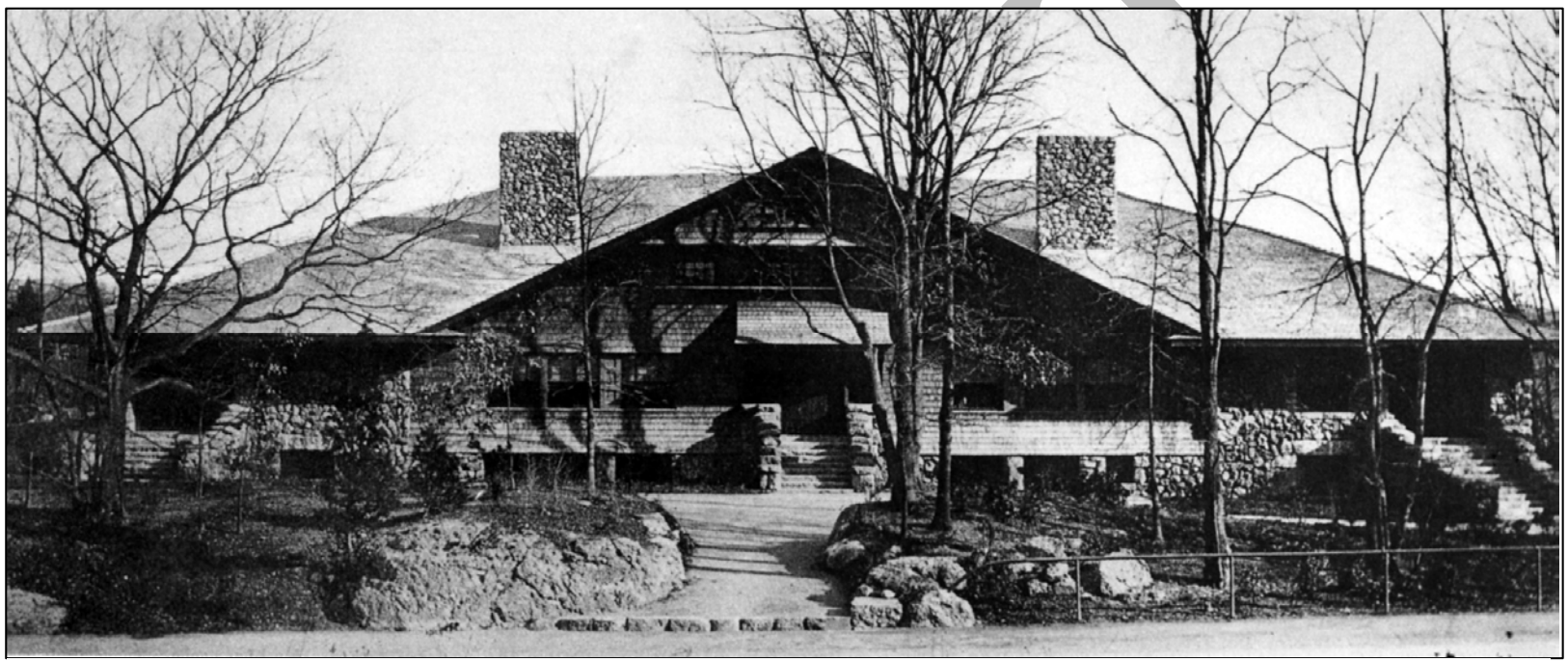
The largest park in the Emerald Necklace park system, Franklin Park is often referred to as the jewel of the Necklace (see Park System map below). Olmsted recognized the unique role that Franklin Park played in the Boston Park System when he wrote:



1894 plan of the Emerald Necklace Park System from the Common to Franklin Park by Olmsted, Olmsted & Eliot, Landscape Architects (National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site).

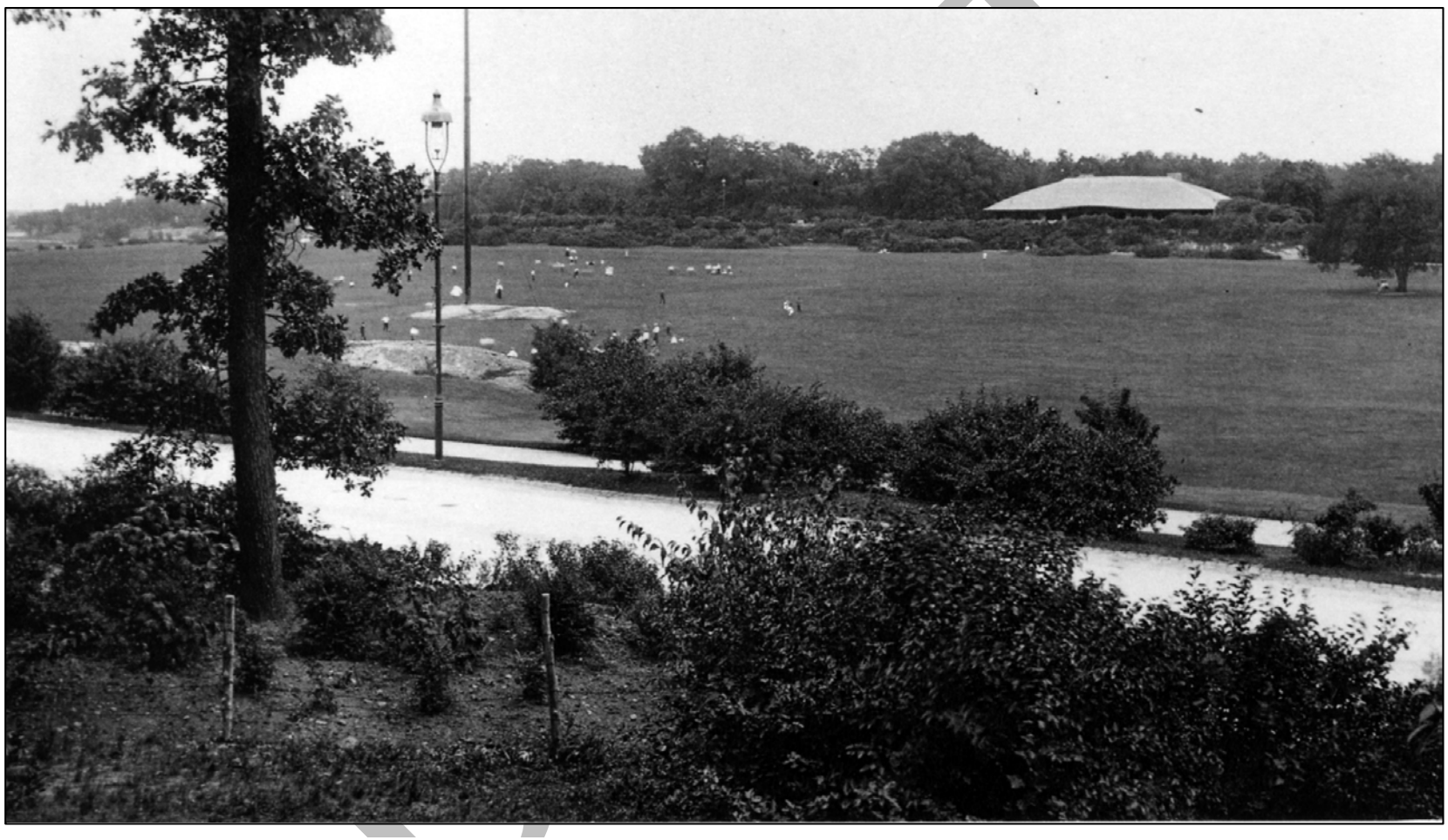
> *A site for a park to stand by itself and be little used except by those living near it should be a very different one from that for a park designed for more general use, and especially for a park which is to stand as one of a series. In the latter case the fitness of a site will largely be found in its adaptation to supply some form of park refreshment that others of the series are ill-adapted to supply or are naturally excluded from supplying.*[2]

Olmsted described the unique qualities of the landscape of Franklin Park in 1881: "Complete escape from the town. Open country. Pastoral scenery. A lovely dale gently winding between low wooded slopes, giving a broad expanse of unbroken turf, lost in the distance under scattered trees. "[3] Citing natural conditions as reason enough to avoid extravagance, Olmsted made simplicity the key element of his design approach[4]. The circulation patterns followed the natural topography of the site. Native planting and rustic structures were incorporated into the design of the park, including the only building designed by F.L. Olmsted, the Playstead Overlook Shelter, which was destroyed by fire in 1945 and never replaced due to the construction of White Stadium (see photo below).



1889 photograph of the Playstead Overlook Shelter, destroyed by fire in 1945 (City of Boston, Doc. No. 15-1890).

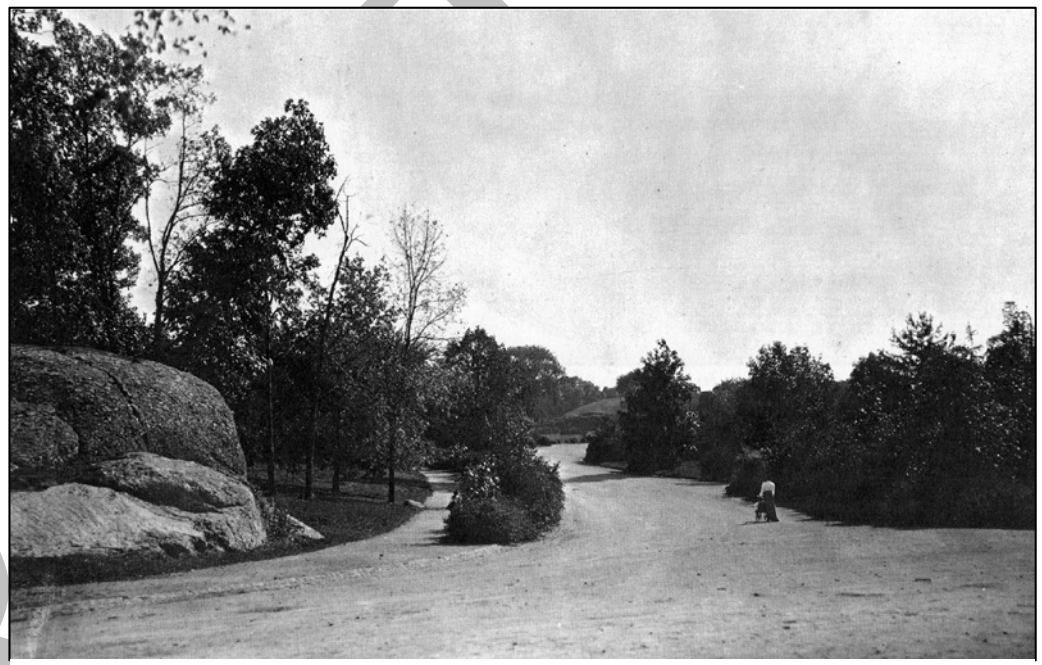
The General Plan for Franklin Park divided the parkland into two distinct sections: the Country Park and the Ante-park. The Country Park occupies the southern two-thirds of the land and was originally intended for passive enjoyment of natural scenery. The Ante-park occupies the northern third and was designed for active recreation and other uses not suitable for the Country Park (see photo below). With Franklin Park, Olmsted demonstrated how a diverse program could effectively be incorporated into one space. Active recreational sections were screened from passive sections of the park with vegetation and walls. The result is a varied yet unified park landscape.



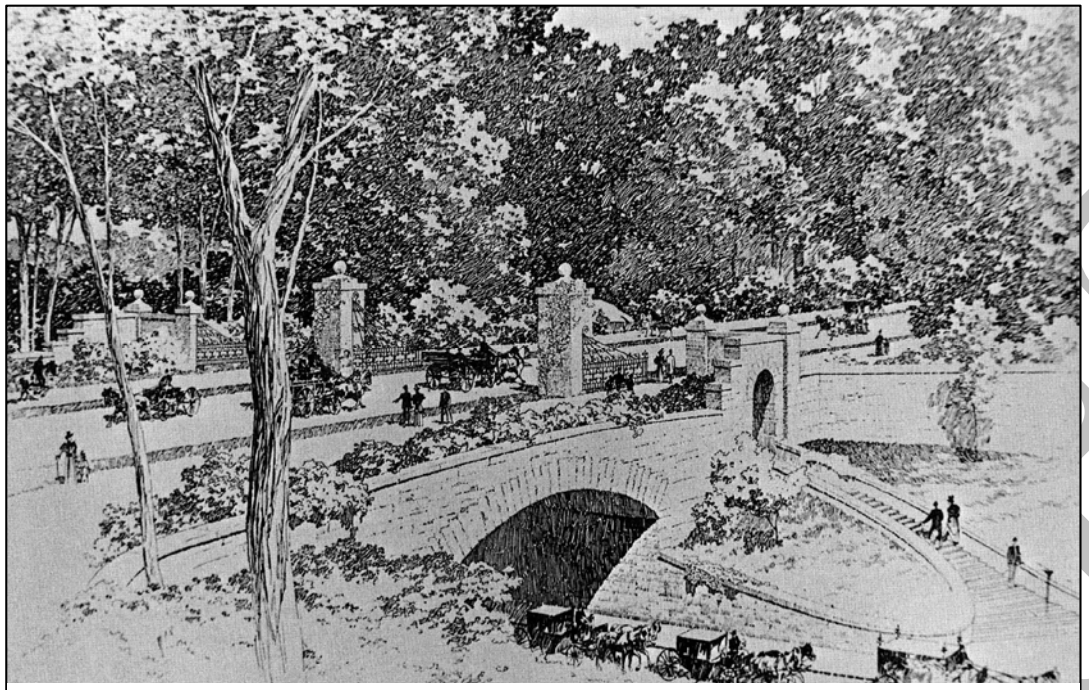
Southwest view of the Playstead showing the Overlook Shelter, c.1900 (National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site).

Glen Road served as a control point between the two portions of the park, separating the Country Park and The Ante-park. "Olmsted felt that Glen Road was needed for through traffic from Blue Hill Avenue to Forest Hills Street, and it was therefore kept, although rebuilt and slightly rerouted. "[5] Unlike Glen Road, the Circuit Drive (also known as "Jewish War Veterans Memorial Parkway") was meant solely for pleasure traffic by carriages traveling from location to location within the park. In 1886, Olmsted wrote on his theory on the design of park roads "a park road is pleasant by reason of that which adjoins it, or is open to contemplation from it, not because it favors speed."[6]

Olmsted employed a separation of ways within the park to isolate incompatible modes of circulation, minimize distractions, enhance views, and improve safety. The hierarchy of circulation systems separated traffic according to volume and type. The three primary circulation routes were the carriage drives, bridle paths, and pedestrian paths. The circulation systems of the Country Park and the Ante-park were nearly entirely separate, converging only near the Blue Hill Avenue entrance and at the Valley Gate, with a secondary connection at Ellicott Arch. The historic carriage entrances to the park were at the Forest Hills entrance, Peabody Circle, Walnut Avenue/School Street, Morton Street, Humboldt Avenue, and an entrance onto the Circuit Drive from American Legion Highway (see photo at right).



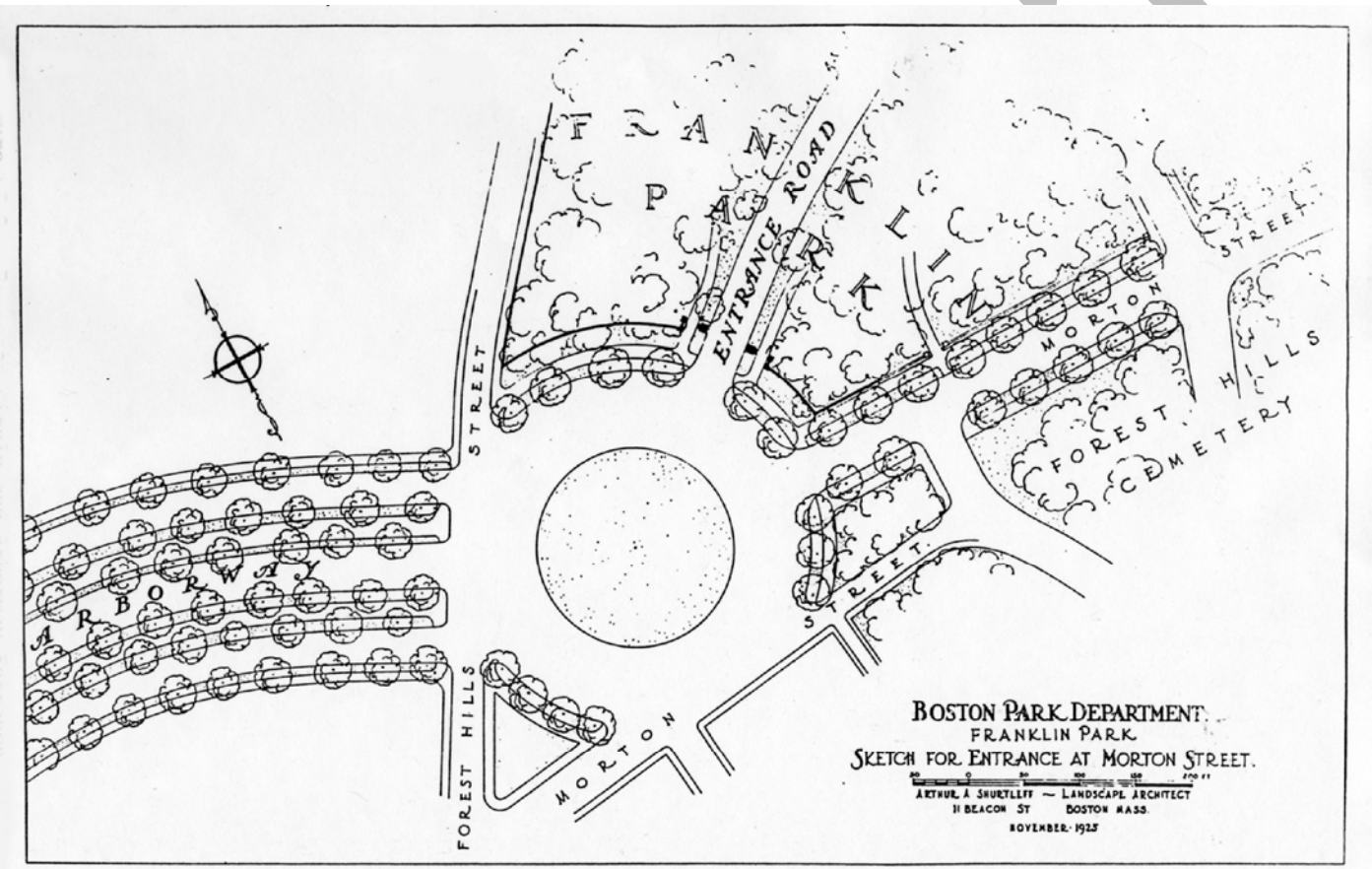
Historic photograph of the entrance to the Playstead from School Street, c.1895 (National Park Service, Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site).



1893 perspective view of the Forest Hills entrance to Franklin Park by Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge, Consulting Architects, showing the historic entrance gates, removed in 1901 (City of Boston, Document no. 25-1894).

One of the most noteworthy entrances to the Circuit Drive, the Forest Hills entrance overpass, was designed by Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge, Architects, in 1893 constructed in 1894 and removed in 1901 (see photo at left).

The introduction of automobiles to Franklin Park marked a turning point in the park's history as the roads constructed for pleasure driving in carriages were used by automobiles as well. Portions of the bridle path, along with walkways and plantings were removed in 1925 when the Circuit Drive was straightened and widened to 40 feet to facilitate traffic through the park. In the same year, Glen Lane was widened and straightened to accommodate trucks. Morton Street was straightened and a traffic circle added at the Forest Hills entrance to enable the Arborway to function as a thoroughfare rather than as an entrance primarily for Franklin Park[7] (see traffic circle map below). The integrity of the Arborway approach was further diminished when the Forest Hills (Casey) overpass was constructed over the Forest Hills Transportation Center in 1951–53, destroying the pedestrian and equestrian link along the Arborway between the Arnold Arboretum and Franklin Park.



Proposed traffic circle (now Shea Circle) and Arborway entrance to Franklin Park by Arthur A. Shurtleff, 1925 (City of Boston Park Department. Future Parks, Playgrounds and Parkways, 1925).

The issue of pedestrian/vehicular conflicts in Franklin Park was raised as early as 1910. In their Report of 1910, the Olmsted Brothers wrote that:

> …automobiles…are so much used for pleasure that it seems advisable to admit them to Franklin Park with reasonable restrictions. They might be gradually or experimentally admitted by a system of special licenses. At some places it may be necessary to provide bridges or subways by which people on foot may safely cross the line of automobile and carriage traffic. At other places it may be sufficient to restrict the foot crossings to certain points and to provide a park guard or keeper during busy hours at each important crossing.[8]

In 1925 pedestrian/vehicular conflicts remained an issue. Arthur Shurtleff (Shurcliff), then the landscape architect to the Boston Park Department, wrote:

> To what degree the traffic of the parkways at the east and west of Franklin Park should be encouraged to use the Circuit Road, recently opened, is a matter which experience alone can determine. A separation of roads at points of crossing by means of underpasses similar to those which have been carried out in Central Park…may become necessary, notably in the vicinity of the Valley Gate and at the crossing with Glen Lane near Peabody Circle.[9]

Transportation issues continued to be identified in the 1980"Revised General Plan for Franklin Park" prepared by V. Michael Weinmayr Associates. Closure of most of the roads internal to the park in the 1980's improved pedestrian conditions in some area but concentrated traffic on Circuit Drive. The 1991 "Franklin Park Master Plan" prepared by The Halvorson Company, Inc provide insight into the changed conditions in the park. A summary of the transportation, circulation and access recommendations in the 1991 Master Plan are presented below.

The primary purpose of the 1991 Master Plan was "to facilitate park restoration and park use by building on the original design principles articulated by Olmsted and reaffirmed by today's park users."[10] The six primary goals of the master plan responded to major needs of the park, including improving the park's image and safety, facilitating use, restoring and maintaining horticultural beauty and ecological health, developing coordinated and improved maintenance and management programs, restoring and preserving the historic design intent, and protecting the park from non-park intrusions.

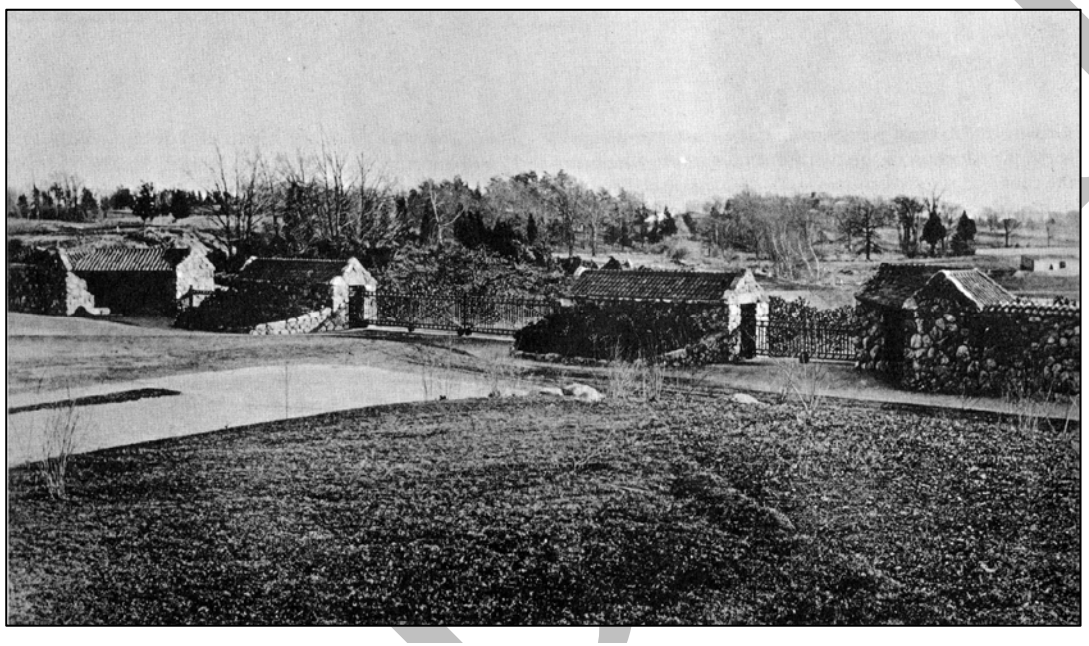
The master plan employed six guiding principles, inspired by Olmsted's original design principles, to preserve the character of the park and enhance visitor experience. The guiding principles included the primary purpose of the park, the park as a whole, the park as a regional park, management and skilled maintenance, essential park elements, and use and preservation. Recommendations of the master plan related to five primary categories, including use and facilities; structures and furnishings; access, circulation and parking; infrastructure; and landscape composition and management. More detailed recommendations were organized by park area.

The recommendations related to access, circulation, and parking were intended to satisfy general park visitor needs, while respecting the historic landscape and minimizing intrusions. They recognized Olmsted's separation of ways as the best and safest mode of park access and use. The recommendations focused heavily on parking and vehicular circulation, as these are park uses that post-date its original design. To more fully address access and parking needs as park visitation increases, the master plan recommended the completion of a comprehensive transportation study.

Park-wide recommendations from the 1991 Master Plan related to access, circulation, and parking included:

- Maintaining emergency, maintenance and special needs vehicular access when making modifications to park roads.
- Reducing the visual impact of parking lots on the landscape with vegetation, while allowing views in and out.
- Providing access control at all parking lots.
- Encouraging multiple uses of parking lots, including the development of a management plan for special events parking.
- Exploring the potential to develop parallel parking on American Legion Highway for general park use as a part of a transportation study.
- Developing supplementary parking outside the park and providing convenient public transportation as park use increases.
- Evaluating path design throughout the park, including the redesign of new, incompatible paths.
- Improving the condition of all paths.
- Phasing-out all concrete paving and replacing with bituminous concrete as necessary.
- Redesigning vehicular control to make park entrances more inviting to the visitor, including the use of rustic materials, such as puddingstone piers with wood or steel gates.

Many of these recommendations were at least partially implemented. Some (like parking along American Legion Highway) may need to be reconsidered but many of the recommendations are still appropriate and fuller implementation should be a goal.



Historic black and white photograph of the Valley Gates, 1889. (City of Boston, Document no. 15-1890).

Other new additions to the park that have greatly changed the landscape include construction of the Franklin Park Zoo (1911), White Stadium (1949), Lemuel Shattuck Hospital (1954), and the golf course clubhouse (rebuilt in 1989). The loss of historic features and structures in the park has also changed the park landscape; these include a portion of the Valley Gate (1901) (see photo at left), the gate at the Forest Hills entrance (1901), the stone and wooden arbor on Schoolmaster Hill (1901), the Schoolmaster Hill Shelter (1930s), the Playstead Overlook Shelter (1945), and the Refectory (1976). The Emerald Necklace Park System, including Franklin Park was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971 as an outstanding example of multi-use open space. Franklin Park was designated a Boston City Landmark in 1980.

4.0 2008 Study Methodology

This 2008 Transportation and Access Study was developed using several methods to gather information and solicit input. Development of the study was guided by the input of the Steering Group, which included members and staff from the Boston Nature Center, Boston Parks and Recreation Department, Boston Transportation Department, Egleston Square Main Streets, Emerald Necklace Conservancy, Franklin Park Coalition, Lemuel Shattuck Hospital, Olmsted Green, and Zoo New England. The Franklin Park Coalition was invaluable as a source of information and insight into community concerns and hosted meetings to discuss issues in the park, listed below. The study team reviewed the large number of planning studies, written reports and other documents related both to the management of the park as well as a few related projects that touch the perimeter of the park and therefore affect access. Some of these studies, such as the 1991 Master Plan, contained observations and recommendations related to pedestrian and vehicular circulation in the park, which are still relevant today.

Review of previous studies was augmented by field inventory and documentation conducted throughout July and August 2008 to record issues observed on site with a fresh perspective, the results of which are reflected in maps and text in sections 5.0 and 6.0 of this report. Field observations were further supported by intersection volume data collected in June, July and August 2008 around the perimeter and within the park, supplemented by data from previous years provided by the City of Boston, MassHighway, MBTA and others related to attendance/participation, ridership, and safety. Daily data was also collected to document vehicles, pedestrian and bicycles.

The study team used the information gathered from all of these sources to develop both the issues identified in this document as well as short and long-term recommendations. Recommendations are organized by focus areas in section 6,

- Review of previous related studies:
  - Published sources related to the history and design of Franklin Park.
  - National Register Nomination, 1971;
  - Revised General Plan of Franklin Park, 1980;
  - Franklin Park Master Plan, 1991;
  - Green Triangle Roadway Visual Study, January 2000;
  - Grove Hall: Housing on Main Streets, 2001;
  - Emerald Necklace Parks Master Plan, 1989, updated 2001;
  - Franklin Park Management Plan, Preliminary Draft, April 11, 2002;
  - Franklin Park Zoo Peabody Circle Restoration Study;
  - Roxbury Strategic Master Plan, 2004;
  - Arborway Master Plan, April 2004;
  - Forest Hills Transportation Action Plan, May 23, 2008;

- Stakeholder Input:
  - Steering Group kick-off meeting, October 19, 2007;

- Franklin Park Coalition Public Meeting, June 3, 2008;
- Joint Public and Steering Group Meeting: Existing Conditions, August 14, 2008;
- Joint Public and Steering Group Meeting: Draft Recommendations, October 16, 2008; and
- Public Comments received via mail, e-mail, and phone on existing conditions and draft recommendations.

- Review of Count Data:
  - New data (pedestrian, bicycle, ad vehicle volumes) collected in June 2008; and
  - Other recent and historic volume data collected from previous studies.

- Review of Other Data:
  - Cross-country data;
  - MassHighway Crash records (2004–06);
  - MBTA ridership;
  - Park attendance data;
  - Shattuck Shuttle data.
  - Zoo attendance; and
  - Zoo Shuttle data;

- Field observations
  - Weekdays and weekends;
  - Mornings, mid-day, and evenings; and
  - During special events.